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ABSTRACT

In the 1971-1972 school year, the Alternative Learning Center Program, originally funded in the 1970-71 school year under Title I, Elementary Secondary Education Act, was expanded to include eight centers, each intended to serve 25 youngsters. Seven of these centers were operationally funded through carryover funds under the Tydings Amendment to Title I, E.S.E.A. The eighth center was operationally funded under Title III, E.S.E.A. The clientele could be described generally as acting out, underachieving inner-city youngsters in grades eight through 12, who were identified as having some latent degree of academic potential. Designed to provide these secondary school youngsters with nontraditional opportunities to complete their education, the overall program was evaluated in terms of five specific objectives: academic performance, student behavioral change, the development of self-image, and work-study relationships. In terms of the stated criteria, no one objective was attained by the program as a whole. When the data were further analyzed on a team basis, in only one instance did a team attain the criterion level specified, and this on only one of the four test variables presented. It should be noted that the quality and quantity of the data submitted presented an unusual number of problems. (Author/JM)

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ALTERNATE LEARNING CENTERS

1971-1972

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UD 012945

Evaluation Office

August 21, 1972

ALTERNATE LEARNING CENTERS - GRADES 8-12

DESCRIPTION

In the 1970-1971 school year, Title I funds supported the operation of an Alternate Learning Center Program for high school youngsters in Boardman Hall at Trinity College. Staffed by a team leader, three teachers, a paraprofessional, a secretary and eleven Teacher Corps interns, the center served a student population ranging between 35 and 40 ninth through twelfth grade youngsters.

In the 1971-1972 school year, the Alternate Learning Center Program expanded to include 8 centers, each intended to serve 25 youngsters. Seven of these centers were operationally funded through carryover funds under the Tydings Amendment to Title I, ESEA. The eighth center was operationally funded under Title III, ESEA.

The eight Alternate Learning Centers are connected administratively to four parent schools - Hartford Public High and Weaver High for grades 9-12, and Fox Middle and Quirk Middle for grades 7 and 8. Each school has an "internal" center and an "external" center, each designed to accommodate 25 students. The internal centers are housed in the parent building, while the external centers occupy facilities remote from, but still administratively linked to, the parent building. The principal of each school has overall responsibility for the operation of the two centers attached to his school. Generally, those youngsters who stand the best chance of being returned soon to the regular classroom are served by the internal centers, while those for whom a longer span of individualized programming may be necessary are served by the external centers.

The external centers are staffed by a Unit Leader, Team Leader and Cooperating Teacher, all certified teachers. They work with a team of five Teacher Corps interns, backed by the services of a full-time paraprofessional, half-time guidance counselor, half-time social worker, and full-time secretary.

The internal centers are staffed by a Team Leader and Cooperating Teacher, five Teacher Corps interns, and a paraprofessional. Since these centers are located within the parent school, they draw on the school for guidance, social work and secretarial services.

The Teacher Corps/Alternate Learning Center Program is administered jointly by the University of Hartford and the Hartford Public Schools. The Project Director, Assistant Director, Program Specialist and Community Coordinator are University of Hartford personnel, while the Local Education Agency Coordinator handles the public school aspects of the program.

STUDENT POPULATION

The clientele of the Alternate Learning Center Program could be described generally as acting out, underachieving inner-city youngsters in grades eight through twelve. The Alternate Learning Center students could also be described as youngsters who were identified as having some latent degree of academic potential. The major criteria by which acceptance or rejection for the program were determined were:

1. IQ and achievement test scores had to indicate academic potential.
2. Acting out or disruptive behavior had to be in contrast to the implications of academic potential which were cited.

3. Behavioral problems could not appear to have been of a long-standing nature.

4. There should be no indication of severe or deep-seated emotional or psychological problems.

All students were referred to the center after a careful screening by the parent school's Pupil Appraisal Team. This process is followed for all referrals to special programs, not just for the alternate learning centers, and helps to ensure appropriate placement for youngsters.

Only one center reached the intended quota of 25 students, with most enrolling between 18 and 21 students at maximum. This under-enrollment has been ascribed in part to the careful but time consuming Pupil Appraisal Team process and in part to an initial lack of understanding of the type of student the centers are equipped to serve.

PROGRAM

The regular school program has not met the needs of youngsters referred to the Alternate Learning Centers. In most cases, the first efforts of a center must be toward helping the student rebuild a positive self image, and to provide motivation for learning. The program is, by design, community oriented, with definite planning for involvement of parents and for use of community resources and agencies in the educational program. While each center serves as a base, pupils have a great deal of supervised mobility. This is especially true of the external centers, where there is no ready access to such school facilities as gymnasium, homemaking, industrial arts, art, music, etc. Obviously, the kind of program these "turned off" youngsters need must be very different from the regular school experience.

The centers are fortunate in having a working staff of experienced teachers and Teacher Corps interns who possess differing personalities, interests and aspirations. Indeed, team members of each center were selected to provide as much balance as possible in this regard. One inhibiting factor, however, is that the majority of the center staff members are white, while the students are predominantly black or Puerto Rican. The wide gap in cultural background between staff and students must therefore somehow be bridged.

This is why a community based approach to education is so important to the Alternate Learning Centers. Parent involvement is one aspect of this. Every effort is made to tap the resources of the community - its people, its agencies, its cultural resources - for the education of the students. The centers have used such services as the physical education facilities at Trinity College, the home-making and dark-room facilities of the Mack Center on Vine Street, a photo studio in downtown Hartford, the Wadsworth Atheneum, the swimming pool at the Parker Memorial Recreation Center, wood shop facilities at Mitchell House, and the like.

In order to provide motivation to achieve, the resources of the greater community surrounding Hartford were also explored. Educational and informative visits were made by various centers to:

Groton Submarine Base

Sturbridge Village

Bradley International Airport

Boston Aquarium

Shubert Theater - New Haven

Talcott Mountain Science Center

One center combined a camping weekend on Cape Cod with a study of the ecology and topography of the Outer Cape. Another group had their first experience with winter sports on a ski weekend in Vermont.

The range of activities was greatly expanded through a grant of $5,000 from the Howard and Bush Foundation, which underwrote the leasing of four station wagons for the last five months of the year.

EVIDENCES OF SUCCESS

One of the most successful outcomes of SADC-Title I efforts in the Hartford Public Schools has been the development and implementation of the Pupil Appraisal Team process for referral of pupils from the regular classroom to various educational alternatives. In each school, a child who seems to be having unusual problems or difficulty in a regular classroom situation may be referred by his teacher or teachers to the school's Pupil Appraisal Team. This team includes the principal and/or vice principal, guidance counselor, and, as needs may indicate, social worker, school psychologist, health personnel, other teachers who know the child -- in short, anyone who can help in making a placement which will be in the best interest of the child. The Pupil Appraisal Team meets weekly to review the cases referred to it and involves both youngster and parent in a consideration of alternatives. Although some feel it is a slow process, most also admit that youngsters are now being placed more frequently in situations which better meet their needs.

Other evidences of success came in the form of student activities -- the youngsters of one center who learned how to make filmstrips and taught this to others-- the study of urban decay and redevelopment made by students of another center, complete with photos and recommendations for redevelopment of a deteriorating block in the city -- the ecology display, terrarium style, produced by a student, featuring a side-by-side contrast of a polluted area in miniature with a healthy,

green environment in which growing plants, mosses and a live toad flourished -- these and a host of other individual instances of student interest and achievement provided evidence of the success of the Alternate Learning Center program.

PROBLEMS

One basic problem encountered in the ALC program this year has been that of effective communication between and among all elements of the program. While the Hartford Public School administration and the University of Hartford staff have established improved lines of communication, interns and teachers in the various ALC units frequently comment that they do not have enough information on program-wide decisions, or even on what is going on in other centers. Efforts in 1972-1973 will be directed toward improving this situation.

Another problem which plagued the program early in the year was that of locating satisfactory sites for some of the centers. The opening of one middle school center was delayed until early October before a satisfactory site was located and occupied. Another center operated in generally sub-standard facilities until late November, before moving to satisfactory location.

An operational problem was that of providing instruction for students in external centers in the so-called special subjects -- physical education, industrial arts and home economics in particular. Some good use was made by some centers of community facilities and personnel, but this continues to be a problem.

PLANS

The difficulty in locating suitable facilities for Alternate Learning Centers, coupled with the approaching time when the Hartford Board of Education must assume fiscal responsibility for the program, indicated a need for locating Board-owned facilities which could be clearly identified as Alternate Learning Center sites. One

such facility, at 44 Niles Street, was in use for two Alternate Learning Centers during 1971-1972 and will continue to be used for this purpose. Plans for 1972-1973 include the taking over of the Board-owned Arsenal Annex building for ALC purposes, and in the face of personnel reductions, three middle school ALC teams have been combined to form two teams to operate in the Arsenal Annex as the Fox Middle School Alternate Learning Center. The one site currently being rented by the Board of Education is an outstanding site in a new building. It may be more economical in the long run to continue this rental than to seek Board-owned space.

In an attempt to arrive at better solutions to the problem of providing instruction in the special subjects (physical education, industrial arts, home economics) plans call for closer liaison and meetings with the system-wide heads of these departments to explore ways in which they might provide assistance.

Ways of improving communications are being explored. Toward the end of the last school year an informal newsletter was initiated, and this will be continued. Another plan centers around the "town meeting" concept, with all the personnel in the program gathering in one place, on a regular basis (perhaps once a month) to take up an agenda prepared in advance from items submitted by program personnel. This may or may not prove practical, but it is typical of the ideas being explored.

EVALUATION

Before proceeding with a discussion of the evaluation proper, several comments are in order. In its original configuration, the general objectives for the Alternate Learning Center program were developed for funding by the Evaluation Office working in close conjunction with the instructional directors. Because the ALC's were viewed as an academic program, objectives were focused largely on the measurement of academic changes which were expected to occur over the course of instruction. At the same time, it was also recognized that some of the objectives

could have changed or evolved from actual program operation, or might have even become inappropriate.

In the fall of 1971, the whole question of ALC objectives was submitted to team representatives at a University of Hartford Teacher Corps session. At that time, it was suggested that the teams might want to review the ALC objectives, submit suggestions for changes where necessary, and then develop individual team objectives which would be more appropriate to their own operations. Since no reactions or suggestions were submitted, the original 1970-71 objectives were retained as part of the funding proposals and were used as the basis for evaluation. In actual operations, and this for the second consecutive year, emphasis was placed on achieving Objectives 1, 2, and 3 which dealt with measures of academic performance, student behaviors, and self-image. Less attention was directed towards Objectives 4 and 5 which dealt with work-study relationships. Specific objectives, measurement criterion, findings, and interpretations are reported as follows.

Objective 1

Based upon the individual specification of a student's needs, an appropriate prescriptive educational program will be developed and administered over a differentially selected period of time. Upon completion of this individually prescribed program, the students will:

a) demonstrate on the Metropolitan Word Knowledge and Reading subscores gains averaging one and one-half year's growth over a total one year period;

b) on the Metropolitan Subtests of Arithmetic Computation and Problem Solving, the students will demonstrate average gains of one and one-half year's growth in arithmetic computation, and one year's growth in problem solving over a total one year period.

Procedure

As each student entered the Alternate Learning Center program, regardless of whether this entry was at the beginning of the school year or at a later date in time, he was to be tested with an appropriate level of the Metropolitan Achievement Test. This test was to have served both as a pre-test for subsequent measures of academic growth and as a diagnostic test for the development of an individual program of student instruction. Similarly, near the conclusion of the school year, each Alternate Learning Center student was to have been tested again with a different MAT form.

While it was reported that this objective probably received the greatest attention and its measurement was generally regarded by the Alternate Learning Center teams as the most significant indication of program success, actual pre and post test data were frequently missing from the programs. Of particular interest was the fact that Weaver High School Internal ALC data were only received after the analysis processing was under completion. Since these data seemed quite incomplete and rather fragmentary in nature, no further attempt was made to include them in the overall analysis.

Findings

The following comparison of pre and post Metropolitan Achievement Test scores are reported, and on a team-by-team basis. Here one should take into consideration the number of youngsters on whom data were submitted as compared with the number having received both pre and post administrations.

COMPARISON OF MEAN METROPOLITAN ACHIEVEMENT TEST SCORES

1971-1972 SCHOOL YEAR

Team	Tot N	Test N	Word Knowledge Pre GE	Word Knowledge Post GE	Word Knowledge Dif GE	Reading Pre GE	Reading Post GE	Reading Dif GE	Arithmetic Comprehension Pre GE	Arithmetic Comprehension Post GE	Arithmetic Comprehension Dif GE	Problem Solving Pre GE	Problem Solving Post GE	Problem Solving Dif GE
WHS Ex	29	17	9.4	6.5	-2.9	5.9	6.5	.6	5.8	6.4	.6*	5.2	6.4	1.2**
WHS In	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
HPHS Ex	26	13	5.1	6.2	1.1	5.5	6.4	.9	6.3	6.6	.3	4.8	4.9	.1
HPHS In	20	11	5.7	6.8	1.1	5.7	6.2	.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Quirk Ex	20	19	4.4	3.6	-.8	3.4	2.8	-.6	5.5	3.6	-1.9**	5.1	3.5	-1.6*
Quirk In	18	4	3.4	4.2	.8	3.8	4.0	.2	5.0	4.9	-.1	2.8	3.5	.7
Fox Ex	22	12	4.2	4.2	0	3.8	4.0	.2	5.1	5.2	.1	4.2	4.6	.4
Fox In	27	11	3.8	4.5	.7**	3.5	4.1	.6	4.2	5.0	.8**	4.0	4.7	.7*

*p..05
**p<.01

Interpretation

In terms of the stated criteria, Objective 1 was not attained by the ALC program. Only at Weaver High School External Alternate Learning Center did an individual team meet the criteria and this only in Problem Solving. Further, only at Fox Internal ALC and at WHS External ALC were any MAT gains of significance noted.

Objective 2

As a group, Alternate Learning Center students will demonstrate the following:

a) Group attendance figures will exceed by 20% average attendance figures for the seventh through twelfth grade levels in Hartford;

b) Average attendance figures will exceed by 40% previous student patterns of attendance. Basis for comparison will be average group attendance figures for the preceding two school years, as obtained from student cumulative record folders.

Procedure

a. Aggregate ALC attendance and membership were reported by the project director. This, in turn, was converted to a rounded mean percentage of the attendance.

b. Using numbers of days absence reported for ALC students covering the preceding two school years, an overall percentage of attendance was computed based on the 180 day school year.

Findings

a. Average percentage of attendance for all ALC students was 73%; for youngsters in Grades 7 through 12, the average percentage of attendance was 89%.

b. Student percentages of attendance averaged out at 83% for the two years immediately preceding admission to the program. Percentage of attendance for 1971-72 was 73%.

Interpretation

Objective 2 was not attained in terms of either of the specified criteria.

Objective 3

Based on student anecdotal records kept by Alternate Center teachers, specific behavioral modifications which have occurred over the course of the instructional cycle will be reported.

Minimal criterion will be defined in two areas by:

a) members of the Alternate Center team, the evaluator, and representative Alternate Center students;

b) a satisfactory rating of behavior as adjudged by responding school teachers.

Findings

Instrumentation for this objective was not developed. However, the section of this report entitled "Evidences of Success" (page 5) indicates some student experiences, reported anecdotally, which were positive in nature and reflect credit on the program.

Objective 4

On the average, Alternate Center students will gain an awareness and an understanding of the world of work as evidenced by:

a) an identification and expression of their own interest patterns in career terms;

b) the ability to translate their interests into career options.

Findings

Although the Alternate Learning Center teams did not follow the recommendation of the previous evaluation report to lower this objective to marginal priority, it became obvious during the course of the year that it probably should have been excluded altogether. Operational needs of the program substantially precluded attainment of this objective. Leadership personnel were faced with the task of molding effective teams from interns who had no previous teaching experience, and interns were faced with a triple commitment:

1) full-time teaching in the center;

2) a 9-credit course load each semester;

3) 10 hours per week of community involvement.

As the year progressed, it became obvious that the major effort in each center would have to be devoted to academic and behavioral gains of students.

Objective 5

Work incentive will be demonstrated by successful work experience. Criterion will be established in conjunction with:

a) the existent Hartford Work Study program standards;

b) youth-tutoring-youth activities;

c) for job banks specifically established to support the Alternate Center program.

Findings

Operationally, at least one of the sub-categories of this objective received some attention, but no objective measure of success was developed. Several centers reported the involvement of their students in successful tutoring relationships with elementary school youngsters. The same operational program needs cited under Objective 4 precluded complete attainment of Objective 5.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

During the 1971-72 school year, an ALC program was operated in Hartford in eight learning centers scattered across the city. Designed to provide secondary school youngsters with nontraditional opportunities to complete their education, and funded largely under the provisions of Title I and Title III, ESEA, the overall program was evaluated in terms of five specific objectives; these were concerned with measures of academic performances student behavioral changes, the development of self-image, and work-study relationships.

In terms of the stated criterion, no one objective was attained by the ALC program as a whole. When the data were further analyzed on a team basis, in only one instance did a team attain the criterion level specified, and this on only one of the four test variables presented.

While no specific recommendations can be made concerning the process and format of ALC instruction, it should be noted that the quality and the quantity of the data which were submitted presented an unusual number of problems. This fact should be taken into some consideration, before one attempts to develop recommendations on the basis of the data.

APPENDIX

SADC-TITLE I PROGRAM EVALUATION FORMAT

FY 1972

1. Source and Amt. of Prgm. Funds:

Title I: $ 230,795

SADC: $ _____

_____: $ _____
(Specify any other)

Date Submitted August 21, 1972

Town Hartford Proj.No. 64-2, Component 18

Program Director: Richard G. Woodward

Program Evaluator: Robert Nearine

Descriptive Title of the Program: Alternate Learning Centers

2. Period of Program:
(X) School year only
( ) Summer only
( ) School year and summer

3. Name (s) of school(s) where program took place: Hartford Public High School, Weaver High School, Fox Middle School, Quirk Middle School

4. Report the full time equivalent (f.t.e.) number of Title I - SADC supported staff who directly taught, tutored, or counseled pupils in the program. Where a staff member directed only one-quarter of the teaching day to program teaching-learning activities, show .25 as the number for that staff member. Also indicate the total program hours of direct teaching, tutoring, or counseling rendered weekly by this staff.

f.t.e. staff number		total teaching hours weekly
(10)	teacher	(250)
(7)	tutor or aide	(175)

f.t.e. staff number		total teaching hours weekly
(1.5)	counselor	(37)
(1.5)	Social Worker (specify other)	(37)
(39)	Tchr. Corps Interns	(975)

5. Report the duration in weeks of the direct services to pupils 38

6. Report the number of public school pupils directly served 184

7. Give the grade level breakdown for public school pupils below.

Pk	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Other
							1	16	34	56	41	13	3	

8. List below the criteria used to select pupils for services of the program being evaluated (economic criteria and educational criteria)

See Narrative, pp. 2 & 3.

9a. If children from eligible Title I attendance areas who attended non public schools met the criteria to receive services, and received services of the town's Title I ESEA program ... indicate the number of such children and the names of the non public schools from which they came.

NONE

9b. Describe the specific services non public school children received.

NONE

9c. If the Title I services for non public school children were different from the services provided for public school children, indicate the value of such services on a separate page and attach to this report.

10a. List the number of children and youth directly served by the project who were promoted to the next grade level at the end of school year 1971-72. 105

10b. List the number of children and youth directly served by the project who were not promoted to the next grade level at the end of school year 1971-72. 28

11a. Give the aggregate days of attendance for the school year of children and youth directly served by the project. 13,062

11b. Give the aggregate days of membership for the school year of children and youth directly served by the project. 17,801

12a. List the number of grade 7-12 youth served by the project who withdrew from school but were not transfer withdrawals, from July 1, 1971 to June 30, 1972. 15

12b. List the number of grade 7-12 youth served by the project who remained in school from July 1, 1971 to June 30, 1972.

(Subtract the number of grade 7-12 withdrawals from the total number of grade 7 through 12 public school youth served in the program which is indicated on page 1 of this report). 169

13. Report the standardized test results secured for children in the program in Table I on the last page (page 6).

See pages 7-10 of the narrative.